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ABSTRACT

Illinois Specialized Teacher Evaluation Programs (I-STEP), Incorporated, has developed a performance-based system for evaluating teachers. A review of the literature convinced I-STEP that evaluation programs are most useful if they are aimed at helping teachers improve their instructional effectiveness, and if they obtain evaluation data from many sources. The I-STEP method involves collecting information from students (who have extensive experience with teachers but no training in pedagogy), outside observers (with good understanding of teaching practice but little contact with the individual teachers' instruction methods), and the teachers themselves. All these observations must be cross-compared to develop reliable assessments of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. The instruments used by each group of observers is designed specifically for that group, and those used by the classroom observers are divided into six subtypes depending on the nature of the instructional situation being observed. Implementing the I-STEP program involves consultation among I-STEP representatives, teachers, and administrators; planning and scheduling; teacher orientation; the evaluation process itself; data analysis; reporting of results; and the provision of feedback to teachers and administrators for use in evaluation conferences and improvement efforts. (PGD)

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THE I-STEP TEACHER EVALUATION PROGRAM FOR COMMON SCHOOLS

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Running head: I-STEP Teacher Evaluation Program

Abstract

Illinois Specialized Teacher Evaluation Programs (I-STEP inc.), offers a performance based system for evaluating classroom teachers in common schools. Field tested instruments, with high levels of validity and reliability, produce data useful for both formative and summative purposes. Evaluation by multiple sources: by students, by professional observers, and by teacher (self) reduces the inherent subjective element in evaluation. The first 19 items on the student evaluation and teacher self-evaluation instruments rate the teacher on specific behaviors related to the four factors of teaching effectiveness. Item 20 is a general effectiveness item. Response to the student evaluation instrument may be compared to the teacher's self-rating, item for item, with the perceptual difference calculated. Professional observers evaluate teachers with one of six instruments, selected according to the teaching method observed. Narrative reports analyzing the data and recommending topics for inservice are prepared for the administrator and for individual teachers evaluated.

The I-STEP Teacher Evaluation Program For Common Schools

Illinois Specialized Teacher Evaluation Programs, I-STEP inc., has developed a performance based system for evaluating teachers in common schools. Although evaluation instruments produce data suitable for both formative and summative teacher evaluation, the primary purpose of the evaluation program is the improvement of instruction.

The development of the I-STEP teacher evaluation program began nearly seven years ago with a search of the literature with respect to teacher evaluation methods, procedures, and instruments in use for evaluating teachers in public schools. This search revealed that administrative decisions regarding teacher retention, tenure, and promotion are typically made on the basis of observations by the principal or his designee using rating scales, usually developed locally by committees. The rating instruments are seldom tested for their reliability or validity or subjected to factor analysis to determine the extent that items on the instruments correlate with the criterion measure, teacher effectiveness. Further, persons who serve on committees to develop teacher evaluation instruments are seldom skilled in instrument construction. As a result, items on these rating forms are often high inference items that do not provide the teacher with information regarding specific behaviors that constitute teacher strengths and weaknesses (Soar, Medley & Coker, 1983). Thus, the typical teacher evaluation results in

identifying specific areas of teacher strengths and weaknesses. Historically, little improvement in teaching effectiveness results from the report card style of teacher evaluations.

Developing a Performance-Based Evaluation Program

The first step in developing a high quality teacher evaluation program is to identify the goals and objectives of teacher evaluation. The I-STEP program of teacher evaluation provides a data base for both formative and summative evaluation. The following characteristics have been identified as essential to producing valid, reliable, and useful formative and summative evaluation:

* provides data useful for the improvement of teaching and establishes a sound data base for administrative decision making.
* uses multiple sources of teacher evaluation.
* utilizes instruments that have been field tested and subjected to factor analysis. Instruments have high levels of reliability and validity.
* provides quality reporting to teachers and administrators.
* provides data useful in planning inservice programs that lead to teacher growth.
* establishes long term commitment of all participants to the evaluation process.

Developing Instrumentation

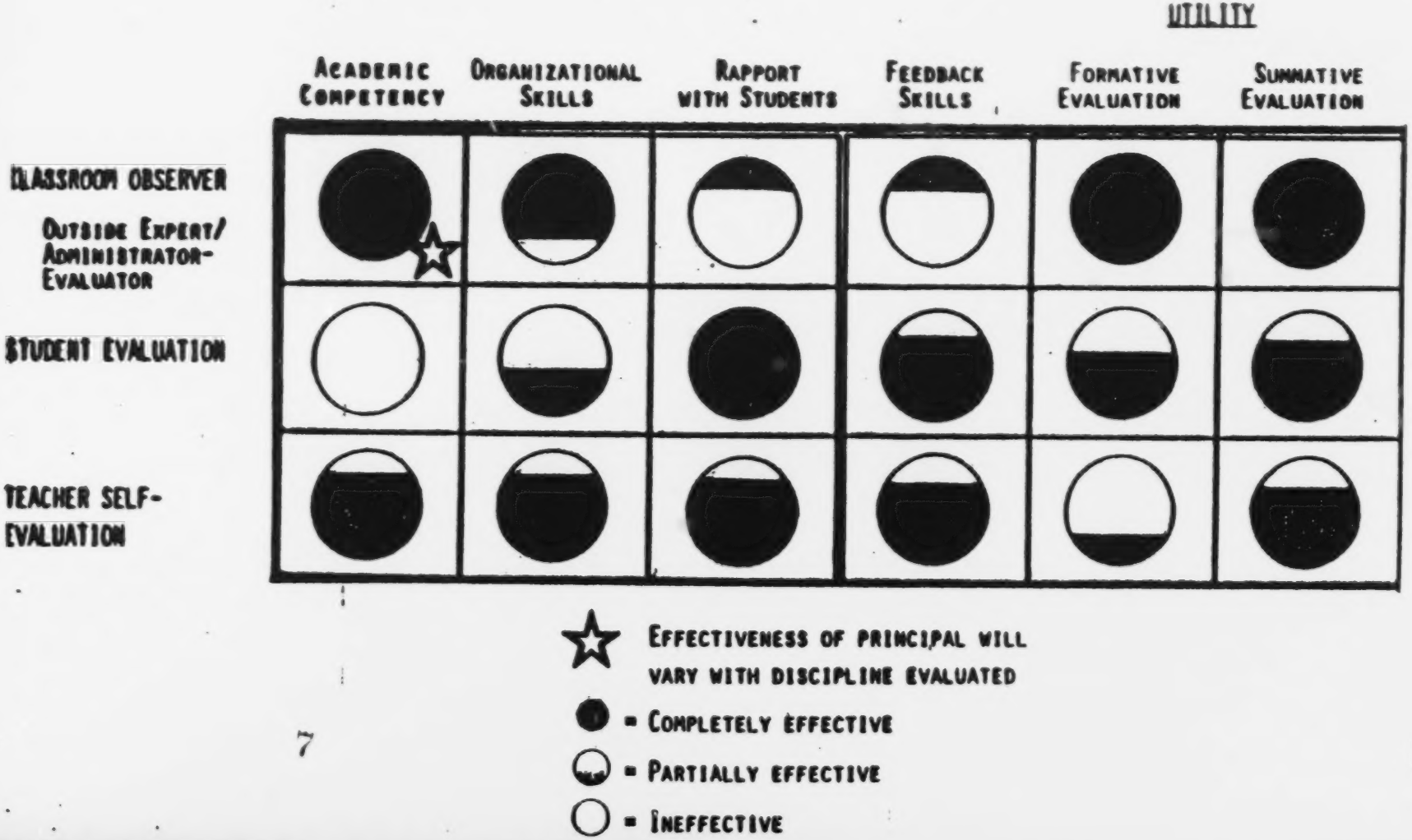
When the characteristics of an effective and efficient teacher evaluation program have been identified, the next

step is to develop instruments that will produce reliable and valid data that are related to the criterion measure, teacher effectiveness. According to Soar et al (1983), no one method of teacher evaluation produces data measuring equally well all the factors of teaching effectiveness. See figure 1, page 4. For example, student evaluation, used extensively in higher education institutions, produces high quality data measuring how well students are taught (Seldon, 1980). However, students are not good judges of the teacher's academic competency. Nevertheless, because students are present every class, they do observe a large sample of the teacher's performance in the classroom. They are particularly reliable judges of the quality of the learning climate in the classroom.

On the other hand, trained teacher evaluators observing the teacher in the classroom are good judges of the teacher's pedagogical skills. Further, if the observer/evaluator is an expert in the discipline evaluated, he is also an excellent judge of the teacher's academic competency and is capable of assessing the teacher's professional growth. Nevertheless, the observer/evaluator sees a small sample of the evaluatee's teaching. In fact, because it is common practice to give the teacher advanced notice of a classroom visitation, it is possible that the observer has not evaluated an example of the teacher's typical teaching performance. Furthermore, the classroom climate is often atypical as students tend to be somewhat distracted by the instusion of an outsider in the classroom.

Figure 1

A COMPARISON OF METHODS OF TEACHER EVALUATION



Another type of teacher evaluation, teacher self-evaluation, can be useful in that the teacher thinks through the spectrum of his teaching practice in the process of responding to each item. When coupled with student evaluation of the teacher on the same items, a comparison of student ratings with that of the teacher on the same item may reveal significant perceptual differences. According to Festinger (1957), the individual teacher experiencing cognitive dissonance will be motivated to change behavior in order to close the perceptual gap. Thus, teacher self-evaluation may be an important factor in motivating the teacher to change and to grow in teaching effectiveness. However, teacher self-evaluation does not produce reliable data for measuring teacher effectiveness for summative purposes. The personal risk factor involved in the evaluation process, together with the natural tendency to perceive oneself subjectively, confounds the results of teacher self-evaluation.

Another method of evaluating teacher effectiveness is the use of standardized achievement tests to determine student growth which is equated with teaching effectiveness. However, the findings of research question the validity of achievement tests as measurements of teacher effectiveness. Because of the threefold problems of student variability, the regression effect, and the limitations inherent in currently available achievement tests, the practice of using student achievement test scores as a measurement of teacher effectiveness does not appear a sound one.

Finally, tests of teacher competency in the teaching subject area and in teacher verbal ability have been used to evaluate teacher effectiveness. Nevertheless, tests such as the National Teachers Exam have not proven good measuring sticks of teacher effectiveness. According to Soar et al, (1983), no study has shown a significant relationship between scores on such tests and teaching performance.

Using Multiple Sources of Teacher Evaluation

As a result of analyzing the literature on the efficacy of various methods of measuring teacher effectiveness, I-STEP determined to use multiple sources of teacher evaluation in order to provide an adequate data base for both formative and summative evaluation. By utilizing student evaluation of the teacher, teacher self-evaluation, and evaluation of the teacher by a classroom evaluator/observer, who is expert in the discipline observed, data relevant to all factors of teaching effectiveness are produced and a solid foundation is provided for formative and summative purposes.

Student Evaluation Instrument

The student evaluation instrument developed by I-STEP has 20 items. The last item, number 20, is an overall effectiveness item. The first nineteen items measure three factors of teaching effectiveness: organizational skills; teaching skills, e.g. question and answer techniques...; and rapport with students. Students are not asked to evaluate the teacher's academic competency. Students rate the teacher on each item by responding to a five-point Likert type scale. Data are reported by percentage of responses for each category and with

mean scores for the item by class, by department or discipline, and by attendance unit. Department and school means are computed as an aid to the teacher in interpreting his evaluation report. Data are also useful to the teacher in that specific areas of teacher strength and weakness are identified. Likewise, topics for inservice are identified and prioritized. Each teacher receives a printout of data for each class in which he is evaluated. The principal is provided a printout of data for all teachers in each class evaluated.

Teacher Self-Evaluation

Teacher self-evaluation utilizes the same items as student evaluation so that a comparison of teacher-student perceptions of the teacher's effectiveness is possible. The individual teacher may see the extent of perceptual dissonance between self-rating and student rating on each item and then compare the mean student rating on each item with the mean rating for other teachers in the discipline and with the mean rating for all teachers in the attendance unit. When the teacher notes his perception of his teaching performance varies significantly from that of students whom he teaches, he will be motivated to change his teaching behavior.

Evaluation of the Teacher by a Classroom Observer

Six different instruments for evaluating teaching effectiveness by a classroom observer have been developed by I-STEP. Each instrument is designed to measure teaching effectiveness for teachers using six different methods of instruction: small group instruction; large group discussion;

demonstration; laboratory lesson; lecture; and skill activity. Each evaluation component is weighted according to its importance in a given teaching method. Evaluation components are identical for each evaluation instrument. They include physical environment, classroom climate, planning and organizing, question and answer technique, and communication skills.

Implementing the I-STEP teacher Evaluation Program

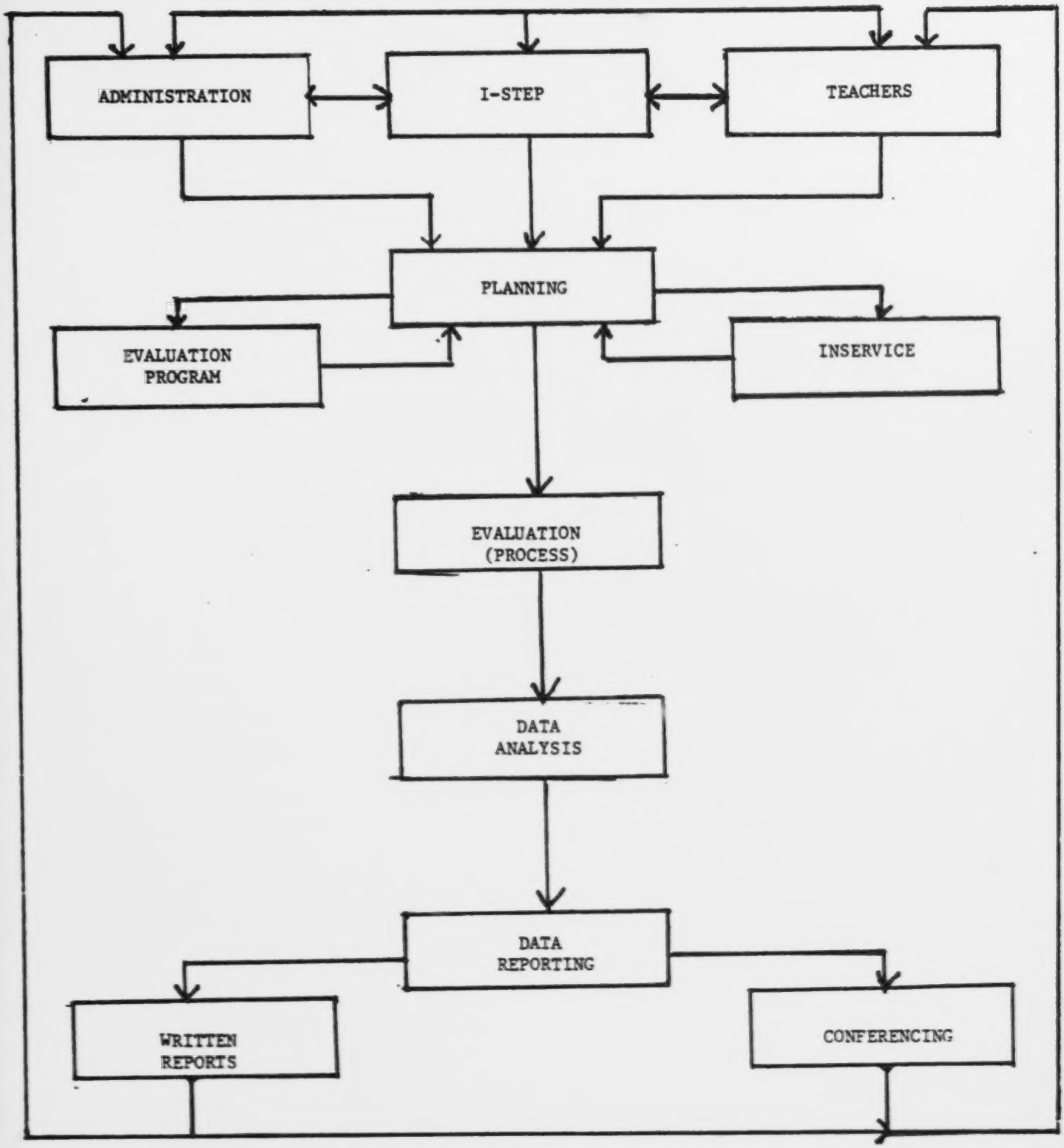
Perhaps the most effective way to introduce the I-STEP teacher evaluation program is to describe its implementation in a typical school setting. The I-STEP Model for Teacher Evaluation, page 9, presents the program in graphic form.

Prior to formal implementation of the program, I-STEP consultants confer with administration and teacher representatives of the attendance unit to orient all parties to the evaluation service. Goals and objectives of teacher evaluation are identified; methods and procedures for implementing the program are determined. Presentation of the program by I-STEP consultants is followed by question and answer dialogue. Teacher/administrator expectations of the evaluation process are identified, and I-STEP's ability to respond to these expectations is delineated. At a second meeting, the actual evaluation process is planned: who will be evaluated; what types of evaluation will be used. The scheduling of the evaluation is planned, together with methods and procedures for administrating the teacher evaluation program. Teacher orientation to the evaluation program is planned. The primary purpose of this orientation is to reduce evaluatee anxiety and to assure teachers that the primary purpose of teacher evaluation is the improvement of

Figure 2

I-STEP MODEL

FOR TEACHER EVALUATION



instruction.

It is good practice to schedule student evaluation throughout an entire week so that students do not become bored with a schedule of continuous teacher evaluation. A monitoring plan will provide proctors for student evaluation, other than the classroom teacher. Students are assured confidentiality of response. Completed questionnaires are placed in an envelope, which is then sealed, carried to a central collecting station for processing by I-STEP. Teacher self-evaluations are also placed by the teacher in a sealed envelope and sent to I-STEP for processing.

Evaluation of the teacher by an expert teacher evaluator is planned so that each teacher scheduled for evaluation will be observed by the observer/evaluator in a selected class. Each I-STEP evaluator observes three teachers in a teaching discipline, an area in which the evaluator has expertise. Evaluators observe, evaluate, and confer with the teacher following evaluation. For each class observed, evaluators are responsible for completing the appropriate rating instrument and for writing a narrative describing the teacher's strengths and weaknesses with recommendations for remediation or continued growth in teaching effectiveness.

I-STEP integrates all evaluations, teacher self-evaluations; student evaluations of the teacher; and evaluations by the observer in the classroom. These evaluations provide the data for a composite report of the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers in the attendance unit. Inservice needs are identified and prioritized. Teahers receive a printout of student evaluation

data for all classes in which students evaluated them together with a printout comparing student evaluation data with teacher self-evaluation. Teachers are also provided with a copy of the report summarizing teacher evaluation findings for the attendance unit.

The I-STEP program of teacher evaluation provides teacher and administrator with a plan for teacher growth, rather than a report card. Because each teacher can identify specific areas of strength and weakness, he is more likely to feel evaluation is meaningful and useful. According to David Hunt (1966), inservice for teachers will be successful to the extent it is congruent with the cognitive development of the teachers for whom it is intended. Hunt's findings may be applied to Loefinger's theory of adult learning. Loefinger describes four stages of adult learning. At level 1, the individual is undifferentiating and tied to social norms. He processes information simplistically. The individual at level 2 recognizes conflict as possible between the individual and norms. He learns to question norms in specific situations. He begins to articulate his own set of values. The level 3 individual is aware of the uniqueness of all individuals and of the inapplicability of norms in some situations. At level 4, the individual is able to retain his individuality at the same time as he interacts with others (Loefinger, 1976).

Hunt places the average teacher about midway on the continuum between levels 1 and 4. Because teachers at the higher levels of cognitive development are able to function effectively in any learning environment, he advises those planning inservice

to target the program to the needs of those teachers at mid-level or lower. Therefore, to be successful, the inservice program for teachers should be aimed toward the practical. Teachers at levels 1 and 2 need to know what to do in specific situations. Because I-STEP's evaluation instruments yield data describing specific teacher behaviors, they produce useful information for inservice programming. Further, teachers in this range of cognitive development must see an immediate use in their classrooms for new knowledge and practice. They also need to be convinced that what they are presently doing is not working satisfactorily. To accomplish the latter objective, I-STEP computes cognitive dissonance in perceptions of teacher effectiveness by comparing student ratings with teacher self-ratings. In this way, teachers who most need motivation for change are provided it. The teachers who need improvement often are capable of seeing events only as right or wrong. Therefore, any proposed change needs to be perceived as "correct" by the teachers. The use of outside professional evaluators, expert in the discipline provides this kind of validation. Also, the practice of orienting teachers to the evaluation program, explaining the reliability and validity of the evaluation instruments, and utilizing multiple sources of teacher evaluation will provide a more complete and equitable evaluation of the teacher's performance in the classroom.

Finally, I-STEP provides for three year reporting and thus gives teacher and administrator a composite picture of growth in teaching effectiveness. Follow-through evaluation and reporting can confirm for the teacher that the effort needed

to improve teaching performance is worthwhile. Positive feedback provides a strong motivational force for the teacher to continue striving for teaching excellence.

In conclusion, the I-STEP program of teacher evaluation is not a report card but a prescription for teacher growth. Quality instruments used by expert evaluators provide a reliable and valid data base for assessing teacher strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation information, thus, identifies specific areas that need to be addressed in planning staff development. Evaluation, then, is viewed as a continuous program of assessment and planning for teacher remediation and growth. The I-STEP teacher evaluation program requires the participation and commitment of all involved in the teaching/learning process.

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